



CBC Newsletter

for members of the Carolina Bird Club, Inc., ornithological society of the Carolinas

Volume 47

June/July 2001

Number 3

Santee Cooper Country in Autumn

The Carolina Bird Club fall meeting will be held in Santee, South Carolina, from Friday, September 21, through Sunday, September 23, headquartered at the Ramada-Santee, I-95, Exit 98.

Santee Cooper Country is comprised of two lakes (Marion and Moultrie), two rivers, two canals, a vast swamp, 450 miles of shoreline, 171,000 acres of land covered by 6-1/2 million gallons of water, and covers the five counties of Orangeburg, Calhoun, Sumter, Clarendon, and Berkeley. For detailed information, refer to santeecoopercountry.org.

Field trips will visit the four units of the Santee National Wildlife Refuge, Santee State Park, the Super Sod Farms and other areas in Orangeburg County, Congaree Swamp National Monument, Pointsett State Park and many other birdy places, including a two-hour pontoon boat ride on Lake Marion.

We expect to see a wide variety of birds, including shorebirds, raptors, ducks, possibly red-cockaded woodpecker, brown-headed nuthatch, Bachman's sparrow, and migrant warblers. For more detailed information on the birds to be seen, refer to Robin M. Carter's *Finding Birds in South Carolina*.

On Friday evening, Craig Sasser, a Refuge Biologist with the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Services, will present an overview of the work he has done for the past four years at Santee NWR for the management of waterfowl and songbirds. On Saturday evening, John Sill, noted author and humorist, will speak.

For nonbirding, significant others there is a factory outlet mall within walking distance of the motel, featuring such names as Bass, Bugle Boy, Famous Footwear, Leggs, Hanes, Bali, Oneida, Swank and Van Heusen, to name a few. There are 288 holes of golf and you can check out the courses on the web site. Revolutionary and civil war battle sites are scattered throughout the area.

While you will not find a gourmet restaurant in Santee, there are numerous eating establishments and you are sure to find something you like from pasta, pizza, fast-food, country cooking, chicken, steaks, ribs, seafood and BBQ, to sandwiches and salads, brunches and buffets.

The Ramada-Santee is an AAA three-star motel with an outdoor swimming pool, cocktail lounge, and coffee in the rooms. Pets are allowed. The toll free number is 888-726-8337 and the local number is 803-854-2191. Single rooms are \$43.20, plus 11% tax, and doubles are \$52.20, plus tax. These rates include a hot breakfast buffet. The rates are good before and after the meeting dates, so come early or stay late and enjoy what the area has to offer. Check-in time is 2 p.m. and check-out is at noon.

When making reservations, check or credit card must secure the first night's lodging. Checks will not be accepted at check-out. Cash or credit card must pay the balance. Identify yourself as a CBC member. A block of rooms will be held for us until September 1, 2001. After this date, rooms will be on a space-available basis. There is a Hampton Inn (803-854-2444) adjacent to the Ramada. Rates will be higher. Camping is available at the State Park (803-854-2444) and there are private campgrounds in the area.

We will have two, two-hour, narrated boat tours on Lake Marion, exploring the beautiful sunken cypress forests on a 38-passenger pontoon boat, equipped with a restroom. Enjoy ospreys, anhingas, herons, egrets and other water birds, as well as alligators and lake wildflowers such as purple water hyacinths, yellow primrose and swamp hibiscus.

One boat trip will leave from the Ramada parking lot at 2:30 p.m. on Friday, September 21, and the second trip will leave from the parking lot at 7:30 a.m. on Saturday, September 22. The cost is \$11 per person, which is nonrefundable unless the provider cancels the trip. The deadline for signing up is August 20. Please use the form provided in this newsletter to register.

Watch for field trip descriptions and sign-up in the next issue of the CBC Newsletter, but because of deadlines, it is necessary for you to reserve your motel room and sign up for the boat ride now, if you are interested.



CBC Fall Meeting — September 21 – 23, 2001

HOTEL RESERVATION FORM

(Rooms may not be available after September 1.)

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ ZIP: _____

Telephone: _____ (day) _____ (evening) E-mail _____

Enclosed you will find \$ _____ (\$43.20 single/\$52.20 double, plus 11% tax) as advance payment (first night) for a room reservation. We (I) will arrive _____ (date) and leave _____ (date).

Send this form with a check to: Ramada-Santee, PO Box 501, Santee SC 29142.

CAROLINA BIRD CLUB FALL MEETING REGISTRATION FORM

September 21 – 23, 2001

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ ZIP: _____

Telephone: _____ (day) _____ (evening) E-mail _____

Enclosed is a check for \$ _____ for _____ member (\$10) registration(s) and/or _____ nonmember (\$20) registration(s). Please include names not listed above: _____

Make check payable to: CBC and mail to: CBC, 11 West Jones Street, Raleigh NC 27601-1029.

FISH EAGLE BOAT TOUR

(deadline for reservations August 20)

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ ZIP: _____

Telephone () _____ (day) _____ (evening) e-mail _____

Enclosed is my check for \$ _____ for _____ boat tour reservation(s) at \$11 each. Please make my reservations for: _____ Friday, September 21, 2:30 p.m. or _____ Saturday, September 22, 7:30 a.m.

Make check payable to Carolina Bird Club and mail to: Carroll Richard, PO Box 893, Hampton SC 29924.

Spring in the Sandhills

To say the spring meeting in the Sandhills was an outstanding success is really an understatement. All the planning and hard work of Susan Campbell and the members of the Moore County Bird Club really paid off. They managed to provide about 150 birders from across the Carolinas with great weather, programs, field trips and birds.

Highlights of the weekend included:

- Peeking into the nest cavity of several Red-cockaded Woodpeckers and watching several very scrawny chicks get their identifying bracelets.

- Finding out that the female hummingbird that Susan caught for one of the banding demonstrations really did have two legs. There was some doubt but she finally showed them both!

- Talking to David Sibley as he



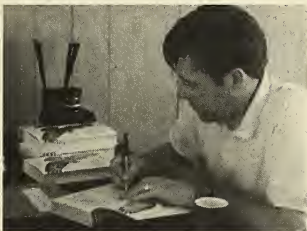
Afternoon entertainment by -
The Piney Woods.

signed copies of his book, *The Sibley Guide to Birds*. One young birder (about 10 years old) received a special treat – his own personal drawing by Sibley as well as his signature. A real treat!

- Enjoying good conversation and food provided by the Moore County Bird club, while listening some wonderful live folk music. The music was provided by a group called ‘Piney Woods’. Two of the members

- David and Jill McCloy are local birders. They entertained us with some lovely traditional Appalachian and Celtic music.

- Listening to Scott Hartley, Superintendent of Weymouth Woods, on Friday night explain how fire is the key to a healthy ecosystem in the Sandhills. So folks actually got to see a controlled burn. Peter Campbell with the U.S. Fish and



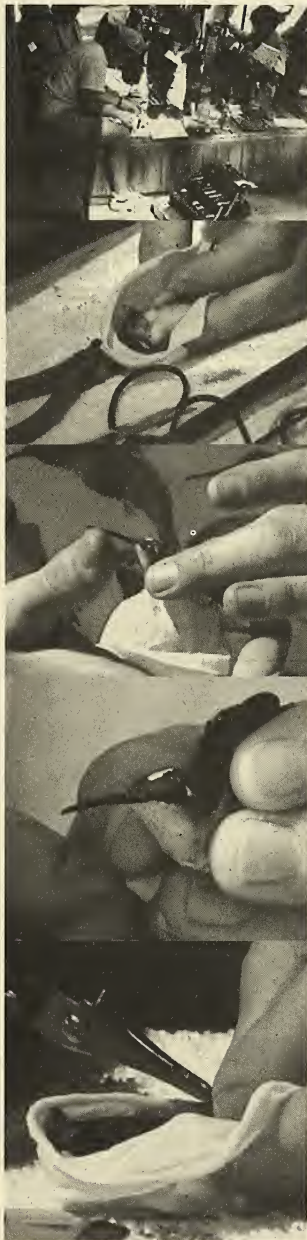
David Sibley autographing his book -
The Sibley Guide to Birds.

Wildlife over came technological setbacks to present a wonderful program Saturday night. He picked up where Scott left off, updating us on the status of the Red-cockaded Woodpecker restoration in the Sandhills.

- Wandering through unique habitats to find specialty birds such as Bachman's and Lark Sparrows, Mississippi Kites and of course the Red-cockaded Woodpecker. Dick Burke managed to wow one group by showing them a Red-shoulder Hawk's nest just as the female brought in a snake for lunch. Then he produced a Bachman's sparrow perched and singing for a good five minutes. All together about 134 birds were seen over the course of the weekend.



Waiting for the Saturday evening program



Hummingbird Banding
with Susan Campbell

Winter Pelagic Birding:

By Steve Schultz

North Carolina's Outer Banks are known to many as THE place to go for summer pelagic birding trips on the Mid-Atlantic Coast. Until recently the winter months were a time to study results of the previous summer's trips and dream of what might appear the following summer from the tropics or the far reaches of the ocean. Recent winter trips from Hatteras or Manteo have proven pelagic birding opportunities abound year round. North Carolina's unique location allows winter pelagic birders to view species of birds normally associated with areas much farther to the north. Alcids, skua, Fulmer and other rarely seen in the southeast species are now known to occur with some frequency in the cold waters of the Labrador Current that eases past the Outer Banks from the frigid north.

March 2, 2001: The drive to the beach felt surprisingly short considering the distance from home to Hatteras takes five hours to cover by car. I made the right turn onto the Outer Banks. A light-colored bird sitting on a signpost caught the edge of the headlights and my first thought was 'owl'. Turning around I pulled alongside a Barn Owl, quite a nice species to spot from a car!

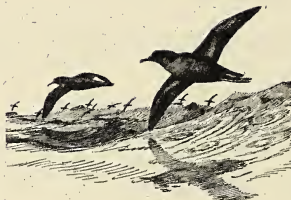
The view of Cape Hatteras Lighthouse's twin beams sweeping the sky indicated my arrival at the Cape. The balmy weather allowed for plenty of mist in the night sky. The interaction of Hatteras' lighthouse and the moist sky was just as magical as I had remembered from a winter trip two years ago. At that time the light was positioned several thousand feet closer to the sea, the new setting a resO'ult of the epic move in 1999. I took a few moments to stand at the base of the light and watch the beams sweep the sky. The feeling of awe was difficult to describe in words and impossible to reproduce in still photographs.



One of these days I'll bring a video camera and hope the weather conditions allow for the magical display to occur.

March 3, 2001: The birders began to arrive at Oden's Dock before sunrise. Mountains of snacks, optics, field guides and foul-weather gear accompanied the 17 or so paying customers. The relatively small number of participants meant there was plenty of room for everyone and their personal belongings. The trip started a few minutes ahead of schedule as the lines were slipped and the twin diesels nudged us away from land. The slow ride through the marked channel allowed for glimpses of more common coastal birds preparing for their day. Brant fed in the shallow shoals near the inlet while overhead chevrons of Brown Pelicans formed up and dispersed to forage among schools of fish. A few gulls lazily flew by to inspect our vessel to ascertain the possibility of a free meal. If they hung around they would be rewarded by one of the hallmarks of a pelagic birding trip, the 'chum line'. Bits of fish, fish oil, and other relatively unwanted bits of refuge from the fishing industry are dropped in the water at short intervals after we are under way. This 'moving buffet line' quickly brings flocks of gulls and other birds behind the boat. The hope is that a rare gull or pelagic species will join the fray and allow close observation. If nothing else, the chum provides an opportunity to study the plumage characteristics of the locally common gulls.

We reached the inlet and bounced over the rollers washing the inlet bar. Soon we were headed northeast parallel to the coast. As we approached the shoals off Cape Point, Captain Spurgeon Stowe spotted a whale nearby and turned the boat to investigate. We were rewarded with views of a Humpback Whale making shallow surface dives. As the water in this area is not deep, the whale did not 'fluke up', or flip its tail. In addition to the head, blowhole, and namesake hump, I got a brief view of one of the long, white pectoral flippers shining through the



green water. As far as I was concerned the day had been a success already, although we have nearly 10 hours to go before returning to port.

We put our stern to the Diamond Shoals Texas-tower and plodded northward looking for the cold water that may contain Razorbills, Puffins and other sought-after winter pelagic species. The first uncommon bird of the day was an adult Little Gull associating with the ubiquitous Bonaparte's Gulls. We saw several others as the day wore on, some quite well as they foraged nearby.

The weather forecast for the day was not terribly optimistic, with rain predicted to overspread the area by afternoon. A massive nor'easter was forecast to form over this patch of ocean in the next 48 hours. We were fortunate to enjoy the oft-quoted 'calm before the storm' as light winds and cloudy, but generally rain-free, skies provided benign seas and good viewing conditions. The air temperature was comfortable, and sea temperatures ranged from 46° to an incredible 71° in eddies spinning away from the Gulf Stream. It was quite easy to determine when the boat entered this balmy water as the color turned from greenish to deep blue, and the air temperature appeared to shift from winter to spring.

As we cruised northward we began to encounter some of the offshore wildlife common to North Carolina. Small flocks of Red Phalaropes burst off the water and wheeled away in coordinated flight. These small sandpipers spend all winter at sea feeding on the Atlantic's abundant plankton. We frequently encountered pods of dolphin including the common Atlantic Bottlenose and the less-common Common Dolphin. The small, beautifully marked Common Dolphin enjoyed

Continued on the next page

Winter Birding Continued

riding the bow wave produced by our passage. By hanging over the side of the bow I not only obtained close-up views of the marine mammals, but also could hear the high-pitched squeaks of dolphin communication as the animals took a free ride a few feet below.

Nearly I spotted an object in the water that was identified as an Ocean Sunfish, a bizarre species attaining several feet in diameter and hundreds of pounds in weight. These fish spend a great deal of time on the surface floating on their sides. The same area also produced a Loggerhead Sea Turtle swimming lazily in the current. This may have been an older turtle as the shell was covered with barnacles. It was amazing how little pockets of animals occur after sailing through seemingly barren ocean.

As we reached our destination, a cold pocket of water northeast of Cape Point, we began to see Razorbills in the water. These alcids are fairly common off the NC coast in the winter. Several small groups passed the boat earlier in the morning, but were difficult to identify. The feeding birds were much easier to make out as they pop up and float on the surface for a few moments before submerging on another quest for food. Although the Razorbills did not flee at the sight of the boat, they did not permit terribly close inspection either. Views through binoculars were satisfactory if not spectacular. We ended up seeing several hundred Razorbills, our only alcids for the trip. The much sought after Atlantic Puffin remained elusive.

Not all of the action occurred on the water. The string of gulls and gannets behind the boat attracted two target species, the Great Skua and the Northern Fulmar. The Fulmar first appeared coming at the boat head on. Most participants received good views as the bird moved from bow to stern and took a cursory glance at our chum offering before moving on. The next visitor was the Great Skua. This

powerful arctic pirate appeared several times throughout our trip inspecting our parade of gulls for any likely targets of aggression.

Pelagic birding may be compared to fire fighting. You wait around a long time for something to happen, and then things get busy very quickly. The slower times allow for inspection of any shipping in the area, a chance to devour some of the snacks dragged on board, or a visit to the head (always an exciting experience on a moving boat). Somewhat akin to the action at a fire station, the crackling of the PA systems puts people into action. The announcement of a Fulmer, phalarope, or Skua brought people rushing to their favorite piece of railing with binoculars or camera in hand.

We drifted back to the south as the afternoon wore on. Approaching Cape Point, our resident string of gulls and gannets swelled with new recruits. This was an excellent forum to study the plumage variations in the Northern Gannet. The black youngsters gradually change to the white, black, and yellowish plumage of adults over three years. Birds of every plumage type could be seen in close proximity as they dove into the wake for a snack of diced mullet or menhaden.

As we neared the waters off Frisco another Humpback Whale was sighted. This great mammal decided to provide a bit more of a show than the previous sighting. After several blows followed by shallow dives, the whale bade us farewell with two dives in which he flips his tail clear of the water. One of the surfacings occurred close enough to the boat to clearly hear the explosion of air from the whale's paired blowholes. I indicated the whale was a 'he' based on recent studies indicating immature Humpback males tend to winter off the coast of the Mid-Atlantic while the breeding population travels to the clear, but food-poor, waters of the Caribbean. Younger males apparently stay farther north and spend the winter feeding on the abundant schools of menhaden found near the coast.

Ten hours after we left our trip came to a close. Birders weary of scanning



ocean horizons but sated of the need for a phalarope, Skua, or Little Gull happily disembarked and notched the fruits of another Atlantic pelagic on their trip lists.

Although several operators run pelagic trips of the North Carolina coast, Brian Patteson is the only one with a series of regularly scheduled winter trips. Information on past season's trips, opportunities for upcoming trips, and other information can be found at www.pattesson.com. Information on trips run by other operators can often be found in the classified sections of the ABA newsletter *Winging It* or national birding magazines.

Hope to see you offshore on the next trip!

CBC News

The annual membership meeting of the Carolina Bird Club was held Saturday night of the Spring meeting in Southern Pines. The primary order of business was to elect new officers. The following members were elected unanimously:

President: Van Atkins, Charleston, SC; **Western North Carolina Vice President:** Dick Blee, Brevard, NC; **Secretary:** Sue Pulsipher, Linden, NC; **Treasurer:** Patricia Tyndall, Wake Forest, NC; **Western North Carolina Member-at-Large:** Charlotte Goedsche, Asheville, NC; **Eastern North Carolina Member-at-Large:** Sandy Cash, Durham, NC; **South Carolina Member-at-Large:**

Kathleen O'Grady, Columbia, SC. We want to thank Clyde Smith and his nomination committee for their work in putting together an outstanding slate of officers.

In Search of Grouse

by Judy Walker

Usually the number 13 is considered an unlucky number. But when thirteen members of the Carolina Bird Club met Derb Carter at the Denver airport it was probably one of the luckiest days of our lives because we were in for an unbelievable five days of birding. Before it was over we would travel nearly 2,000 miles visiting literally every corner of Colorado; traverse just about every type of habitat possible from alpine tundra to open prairie and high desert; encounter a wide variety

of weather from 85 degrees to blizzard conditions and best of all discover 150 species including 8 species of gallenaceous birds. To summarize the trip in a page and a half will be nearly impossible but here's my valiant attempt at describing some of the highlights.

The first day set the tone for the trip. It included expected birds as well as a few unexpected. At our first stop, a backyard feeder, we had typical Colorado feeder birds - Pine Siskens, a variety of juncos, Pygmy Nuthatch and some strange looking squirrels. We weren't expecting the aerial display of a pair of Northern Goshawks! On our way up to

Guannella Pass we encountered another unexpected treat - a flock of about 50 Bohemian Waxwings. At the pass, on the snowfield, we discovered at least a dozen White-tailed Ptarmigan. We were able to get to within 50 feet of several of them. Of course seeing them was not always easy. They blended into the snow so well

it was hard to keep track of them.

Of course if you are in Colorado you have to stop at a ski slope and that we did. However, we were not in search of a downhill thrill but rosy finches at a feeder. As we were waiting Harry Le Grand and Jeff Pippin

Black-billed Magpie



Lesser Prairie Chicken



White-tailed Ptarmigan

explained the intricacies of identifying the different species because as they noted the birds *always* traveled in a large group with all the species mixed together. Within a few minutes one single Hepburn's subspecies came in and then a single Gray-crowned. We moved closer to get better looks. As we did we kidded Harry and Jeff about single rosy finches. Then out of nowhere came a mass of feathers and wings. Two hundred plus birds descended upon the feeder. All three species and the subspecies were there and relatively easy to pick out. Suddenly the birds flushed and flew all around us nearly running into us. They settled again at the feeder and then after a few minutes of gorging themselves they flushed

Warm but windy weather



again up slope and disappeared into the trees. This all took place in about a 20-minute time span. It was a breath-taking experience.

Although we had some great encounters with a wide variety of birds - Red-naped Sapsucker at Monarch Pass; Red-crossbills in the Wet Mountains; Lewis's Woodpeckers and Yellow-headed Blackbirds in Canon City; Williamson's Sapsucker and Gray Flycatcher on the south rim of the Royal Gorge; Pinyon Jays in Temple Canyon and Golden Eagles every day, most of us had come on this trip to see grouse. And we were not disappointed. The first night found us out in the middle of nowhere surrounded by booming Greater Sage Grouse. Some

birds were within a 100 feet of the van. Looking at the birds through the

scope was breath taking and awe inspiring. And the sound can only be described as ethereal and eerie. An unbelievable way to close a day of birding.

The next morning, found us up and out by 4:30 and on our way to a Sharp-tail Grouse lek. Before we got there our guide, a Fish and Wildlife staff person, stopped the caravan and had us get out. He indicated there usually was a blue grouse in the vicinity and sure enough out walks a female Blue Grouse. She posed very nicely for everyone to get



good looks. We proceed on to the lek. The birds were not as close as the night before but you could still see and hear the birds well especially when they 'danced'. While watching the grouse a Golden Eagle passed behind them. The rising sun turned the bird's head a brilliant gold, which shone like a star. At that moment it was obvious why it was called a Golden Eagle.

After a filling breakfast in Craig we headed south to Gunnison. Along the way we attempted to find another grouse – the Chukar but the time of day worked against us. I was amazed at the habitat we were looking in. It was a very arid, rocky canyon with very little vegetation. It was hard to believe that anything would want to live there. But we did encounter a few creatures – Black-throated Sparrows, Mountain Bluebirds, Rock Wrens and a very interesting lizard with a bright yellow head and a turquoise green body.

Late afternoon found us on the rim of the Black Canyon of the Gunnison near Montrose. The wind had picked up so the birding was almost not existent. But just as we were pulling out of the parking lot Derb spotted a male Blue Grouse walking along the road. We all managed to get out of the vans without spooking the bird and watched it walk about 10 feet into the brush. It got up on a low perch and began to boom. As we watched in rapt silence I wondered if the female we had seen that morning some 300 miles to the north could hear him.

The next morning we were up and at the Gunnison Sage Grouse lek just before dawn. Here we had about 20 birds at a greater distance. These birds were smaller than the birds we saw the first night. They had longer head feathers and sounded different. Still, it was a very impressive display. After they left the lek we were treated to two perching Rough-legged Hawks which were as different as night and day. I must admit that by the end of the 5 days I was getting pretty good at discriminating between Rough-legged, Swainson's, Ferruginous and Red-tailed Hawks. But probably could not tell the difference now.

We headed back over the Rockies and headed for the Great Plains to get our

last two grouse. We found the Lesser Prairie Chicken in the Commache Grasslands near Springfield. I had the opportunity to be in the blind, which gave me a birds-eye-view of the birds from about 75 feet. After listening to these guys it was obvious why they were called 'chicken'. They cackled and carried just like domestic chickens. Unfortunately, there were only five birds on this lek, a testimony to their endangered status.

Before we saw our final grouse, the Greater Prairie Chicken, we made a detour to the Pawnee Grasslands, near Greeley. Thanks to another Carolina Bird Club member, Steve Dinsmore we were easily found several Mountain Plovers in the vast expanse of the grasslands. As we drove through the grassland to Wray and our final grouse, we also found McCowan's and Chestnut-collared Longspurs, a Prairie Falcon, several ducks, lots of Ferruginous Hawks and a pair of Great Horned Owls nesting in the only tree for miles.

Meanwhile the weather was turning ominous. High winds had spawned tornadoes to the east of us and the forecast was calling for blizzard conditions the next (our last) morning. For the last time we got up at 4 AM to board a bus to the blind at the lek. It wasn't quite as cold as we thought it was going to be but it was drizzling. When we got to the blind it started thundering and lightening, but the male birds were there in all their splendor. These guys didn't sound like chickens though. Their calls were more reminiscent of jungle calls, ethereal and eerie like the Greater Sage Grouse. Although all the males were there, about 20, in the pouring rain, the females had enough sense to stay out of the rain, and we didn't have to worry about disrupting their mating rituals when we left about 6:30.

As we approached Denver it started snowing which probably was good. It made it easier to leave. We had had beautiful weather and great birding but now it was time to leave with our memories and new friendships.

Derb had promised us grouse but we found so much more. Thanks for all your hard work and miles of driving. Derb, it was a great success!

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**Submit membership applications
and change of address to:**

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WEB SITE: www.carolinabirdclub.org